

Hidden in the Binary by NotQuiteHumanAnymore

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Summary:

Beverly Marsh doesn't have a soulmate, she has a number.

It doesn't take long for her to decide that means she's got no one at all.

Eleven doesn't know what soulmates are, not until after.

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Author's Note:

Er, I wrote this instead of Christmas fic. It's not very holiday-y. Oops?

Beverly was the only person that she knew without a name on her wrist. No, instead of a name she had numbers. Because of course she did. They stood in an even line on her wrist, like a tattoo.

011.

The universe couldn't even get that right for her.

When the rumors about her started, her so-called friends used that against her. They said she had a number because it counted the number of people she'd slept with. Their words burn her and her heart breaks, and she knows, then and there, that she doesn't have a soulmate. She has a number, and people weren't numbers. Somewhere, whoever programmed the shitty soulmate matrix fucked up.

She started covering the mark with makeup. She didn't want to look at it.

But seeing the blank spot on her wrist just made her want to cry. Or throw up.

She stopped spending time anywhere. She couldn't go back to the house- her dad was there.

She didn't have any friends.

She couldn't go to the places that used to be a safe haven for her, because then she'd see her "friends" and that's not safe, either. Safer than home, but it was becoming clearer and clearer that she didn't have a place. Anywhere.

She had no home, nothing tying her to Derry.

She didn't have a soulmate, nowhere to go.

So she stayed, stuck.

And then she met Ben, and she met the Losers, and for a brief, shining moment, she thought maybe. There are only seven of them, but there's room in all of their hearts for more. Maybe what her mark means is that she's meant to find these people, and she's meant to be friends with them and the other five who come along.

But she isn't that lucky. She'll never be that lucky. And when the clown grabs her, when her vision fades and she realizes that she's going to die here, looking up at the swirling masses of the kids just like her that had gone missing or gone looking, she thinks "this is okay."

It probably isn't the best last thought to have, but it takes the impossible choice from her: stay with nothing, or go with nothing.

Here she doesn't have to do anything. Nothing but float.

She's pretty sure she'd be good at floating. She knows she's pretty, she'll make a nice little addition to his collection of horrors, and she doesn't want to give up, but no one out there is looking for her. No one out there will care.

And she floats.

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Eleven had never heard of soulmates.

She knew that the men she'd killed had names on their arms or necks, but she didn't know what they meant. She just figured it was like her number. Papa never told her.

It takes her breathless escape, pure adrenaline, pure fear pushing her away away away from the horror that she'd met, the horror she'd called forth, from what Papa had made her do-

She runs. Through the storm drain, past the fence and beyond. Out.

Cold dirt and grass crunch beneath her bare feet, and the sensations were so foreign it almost distracted her.

She reached pavement and kept going. She ducked back into the trees and kept going.

It was another three days before she met Mike, and she saw that the name on his ankle didn't match the name he gave her.

"Will Byers." She read quietly. His eyes lit up, his face shooting up to look at her.

"You know where Will is?!" He demanded.

She almost felt bad when she shook her head and pointed to his ankle. She pointed at him.

"Mike." She explained, before pointing back down at his ankle, "Will Byers." The light in his eyes dimmed.

"It's a soulmark," Mike explained. "It means I have a soulmate."

"Soulmate?" She repeated slowly. She thought she recognized the word, from training, from eavesdropping, from her cage.

"Yeah, it means that there's someone out there that I'm meant to live with forever."

"Will Byers." Eleven repeats.

"Will Byers." Mike parroted, and his voice is sadder than she thought voices could be. "You have one, too. How do you not know?" Eleven's brow furrowed. There wasn't anything on her ankle. She shook her head and showed him her wrist, pointing at her chest like she'd done a few minutes prior.

"Eleven." She repeats. She tapped the tattoo. "I remember." She made a face. "Needles hurt." Speaking was so much harder than she'd thought it would be. She'd never needed to speak before. She could read, she could almost write. She could listen.

She'd never needed to speak. No one had ever cared what she had to say. Mike shook his head, his face screwing up as he looked at her tattoo.

"Not that one." He explained. "It's on your neck. Here, I'll read it for you." Obediently, she turned around, looking at her hands in her lap, knotting her fingers together in a gesture of nervousness that she didn't know she'd learned.

"Beverly Marsh." Mike read, loud and clear. The name rocks Eleven to her core and she wondered who could have a name quite like that.

It sounded like music.

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The worst part is that she recognizes the boy in the photo. When she called the monster forward and through, there had been someone else in the Upside-Down, for just a moment. Exactly where the monster was at the right-wrong time, and when she'd shoved back against the monster, the boy had gone, too, and now here he is, staring up at her with a smile from a picture in Mike's room.

She points at him, because words are still too much, and Mike's face goes slack, then excited, and then distraught.

"You do know Will." He said, and this time, she nodded.

"Didn't know his name." She explained, trying to be patient.

"Will you help us find him?" Mike asks, and the pain in his face kills her. She brushes her fingers against the mark she now knows is on the back of her neck. She wonders about Beverly, about the person out there who she's meant to live with forever. She wonders what Beverly would say if she got stuck in the Upside-Down instead of Will.

She wonders what happens to the soulmark when one half of the soulmate pair dies.

She nods. Mike helped her, she owes him.

The name Beverly Marsh echoes through her ears. She hopes that this person will like her as much as Mike does. That she'll be proud of Eleven if they ever find each other.

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It was a year later when Eleven remembered the name on the back of her neck.

She asked Hopper to read it, and his eyes went wide and then soft.

"Didn't realize you had one, kid." He said quietly. She nodded.

"Mike showed me." She turned around and mirrored the position she'd taken the year before- fingers tangled in her lap, head bowed to bare the words.

"Beverly Marsh," Hopper said with a whistle. "That sounds like a nice name."

"Yes." Eleven agreed. "A nice name."

That night, she snuck back out into the main room and turned on the t.v., letting the quiet static fill her ears. She blindfolded her eyes.

She normally had more to go on than this, but according to Mike soulmates are destiny.

So she concentrated.

She walked through the nothing for what felt like hours, the sounds of her footsteps echoing off of walls that don't exist.

Finally, she heard something, a far-off voice, and her feet sped up. Her mind raced with the name of her soulmate.

"You'll. Float. Too."

The words reached her ears with a sound like glass scraping against metal. She dropped to her knees and the words repeated, over and over, until they were all she can hear.

"You'llfloattooYou'llfloattooYou'llfloattoo-"

She didn't realize she was covering her ears, that she'd shut her eyes until she makes a concentrated effort to open them again.

Like every other time she'd looked for someone, the negative space around her didn't change, but there was a shift, a ringing in her ears that subsided, and this time the words echoing in her mind softened.

Her ears popped, and she looks up.

And up.

Before her, a girl floats.

Her hair was as short as Eleven's, curling red around her face. Her eyes were glazed over and Eleven knew that she was as lost as Will had been. Her dress was dirty and soaked through with water of some sort. There was blood under her fingernails.

Eleven knew enough about monsters to know that one had to have done this.

She stayed there, frozen, waiting for some kind of life to show from her soulmate, but there was nothing. The closer she looked, the more Eleven realized that she has seen this girl in dreams. Waiting for her, watching out for her even when she didn't know Beverly existed.

She reached out for one of Beverly's hands, dangling in the air between them, terrified that it was going to disappear like smoke the instant she touched it. She looked up at Beverly's empty face, taking in a sight that neither of them could see. She could feel her nose bleeding, her ears bleeding, she knew she'd stayed too long.

"Beverly Marsh?" She whispered, reaching out to touch.

Beverly vanished before her fingers could make contact, and Eleven was alone.